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ABSTRACT

A survey of 80 department chairpersons, directors of forensics, and debate coaches indicated an increased use of nontraditional, audience-centered debate paradigms since the National Developmental Conference on Forensics issued its report advancing alternative debate options during the 1970s. Report recommendations on expanding the role of tournament competition included the following: (1) providing forensic opportunities for a changing student population, (2) using forensics to influence public affairs, (3) building a supportive relationship between forensics educators and other members of the speech department, (4) developing ties with international programs, (5) offering a variety of forums to discuss significant contemporary issues, (6) developing course sequences in argumentation, and (7) preparing students for inquiry and advocacy roles on public policy. Survey respondents reported using 15 different alternatives to the traditional debate paradigm, listing the pro-con forum most often. They indicated a number of benefits of audience centered debates, including increased visibility for the forensics program, opportunity for audience analysis, and educational experiences for students. The potential for research in forensics increases as the debate paradigm continues to expand. (MM)

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THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORENSICS:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PAST DECADE IN FORENSICS VIEWED

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SEDALIA

TOWARDS AN AUDIENCE CENTERED DEBATE PARADIGM:

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME EXISTING MODELS

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BY

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TOWARDS AN AUDIENCE CENTERED DEBATE PARADIGM:

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME EXISTING MODELS

INTRODUCTION

The editors of the report on the National Developmental Conference on Forensics summarized the issue of alternative activities for debate with the following thoughts:

> A concept of forensics as communication greatly expands the prospect of forensics education. We can speculate about some of the potentials for development. One possibility would be to broaden argumentation by employing alternative forms for debate, focusing on policy issues of varying content and impact, and reaching diverse audiences...Another possibility for widening the horizons of forensics education is to recognize situations other than those that obviously fall into the debate paradigm. Our students should be able to apply the forensics skills they are developing in the worlds of advertising, politics, voluntary association and academia, as well as in the judicial and legislative debating situations... Only an outlook on forensics that transcends the rules and norms of intercollegiate competition can extend the province of forensics beyond the tournament.[1]

Certainly, the prospect for debate that exists outside the intercollegiate tournament has held tremendous interest for this coach. As a young director of forensics immediately following the National Developmental Conference, I often turned to the published report for guidance, not only for developing an educational underpinning but also for implementation ideas for the program that I was directing. I am certain that the members of the original group would be pleased to know that the many long and arduous hours of work in attempting to focus a direction for

the future of forensics was well spent, at least from the perspective of one who has utilized and benefited from the published report, Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective.[2] The recommendations seemed to be broad enough to stimulate ideas and directions for my forensic coaching and, at the same time, specific enough to generate criteria for accountability. I soon discovered that by using alternative debate formats, I could enhance the educational experience of my squad. I also saw audience debate activities as a way to stretch a budget so that a maximum number of students could be served and as a pragmatic method of demonstrating real world application of debate beyond the tournament round. The audience debate activities also had tremendous public relations and recruitment potential. Administrators, parents, the community and future team members all seemed positively drawn to advocacy through audience centered debate activities. Therefore, this paper will address the non-tournament debate paradigm, not as a better approach than tournament debate or as the only approach for a forensics program, but as a viable and exciting additional prospect for a forensics program. Specifically, this paper will review the written recommendations of the report of the National Developmental Conference on Forensics that advanced the concept of alternative debate options. Next, in order to see how widely disseminated and how varied these alternatives are, the results of a national survey will delineate some of the prevalent advocacy activities that are centered in speech communication. An analysis of these audience centered paradigms will be advanced along with the perceived values and benefits that forensics coaches felt these activities will be posited as the forensics community enters its second decade following the National Developmental Conference.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONFERENCE ON FORENSICS

Although the editors were careful to state that the resolutions adopted by the conference represented proposed answers to questions about the nature of curricular offerings, the range of extra curricular opportunities, the audiences to whom forensics is addressed and the impact of forensics on public affairs, it is interesting to note just how directly these indirect recommendations encourage expanding debate activities beyond the tournament setting. Of the sixteen recommendations posited in the chapter on Future Goals and Roles, seven of the recommendations bear examination in light of the potential they generate for expanding the role of tournament competition:

Recommendation One: Opportunities for experiences in forensics should be provided for as many people as possible by developing programs that are responsive to the changes in the composition of student populations and to their emerging needs in other settings, and by adjusting the demands of instruction in forensics to the goals of a liberal education and the social and intellectual development of people.[3]

Recommendation Two: Forensics should influence public affairs by various means, including educational seminars and programs for general audiences, publication of the products of analysis of public problems and dissemination of such analyses to appropriate officials.[4]

Recommendation Three: The department of speech communication is the most appropriate home for forensics programs; forensics educators should work toward the development of a mutually supportive relationship with their departmental colleagues. In addition, forensics educators should seek the development and expansion of mutually beneficial relationships with related disciplines.[5]

Recommendation Five: Forensics educators should seek further development of mutually supportive relationships with international programs.[6]

Recommendation Seven: Forensics should provide a variety of forums for the systematic analysis and discussion of significant contemporary issues. Forensics has a societal responsibility to promote rational decision making and to provide training in adapting argumentation to a variety of audiences and situations.[7]

Recommendation Ten: Secondary schools, colleges and universities should develop sequences of courses in argumentative perspective on communication. Additionally, nontraditional programs should be developed to make argumentation curriculum available to a wide audience of students.[8]

Recommendation Fifteen: To improve the ability to participate in and criticize decision making in society, preparation of students for inquiry and advocacy concerning propositions of public policy should be continued. In addition, new programs should be developed that adapt to decision making in other areas, especially the judicial.[9]

Besides these seven recommendations for Future Goals and Roles, the chapter on Recommendations of Theory and Practice also addressed the issue of alternative activities as well as audience models:

Recommendation Fifteen: More frequent use of alternative events and formats in forensics should be encouraged.[10]

Recommendation Twenty-Two: Audience debating should be promoted through public debates on the national topic and issues of local concern, as well as through tournaments or rounds within tournaments, based upon the audience vote model.[11]

Throughout the report, alternative forms of debate and suggestions for audience centered models are advanced as a way of expanding the

prospect of forensics. The question we pose at this juncture, a decade later, is simply, what debate alternatives are being used and how extensively are they being employed?

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer this question, a one page questionnaire was sent to three hundred members of the American Forensics Association who had designated their position as directors of forensics, department chairmen or debate coaches.[12] The purpose of this questionnaire was to ascertain if the members of their school's department of communication sponsored 1) an intercollegiate debate program, 2) alternative programs that utilized audiences as part of their program, 3) if so, the types, variety and frequency of these alternative programs, and 4) if the programs had been in existence for over ten years. Last of all, the questionnaire asked the respondents to enumerate the benefits or values of having audiences attend or participate in the on-campus debate activities.

Eighty responses were received from both high school and college forensics directors and coaches from 37 states which represented a 27% return. The data was analyzed using the subprogram Condescriptive from the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which is appropriate for computing descriptive statistics for continuous interval-level data.[13]

FINDINGS

Basic demographic data indicated a profile of the school that has a debate team. The mean number of students is 9,408; the range of student populations was from 120 students for the smallest school responding to 40,000 for the largest. Ninety percent of the schools answering the

survey reported that they had a debate team and 83% of these invite audiences to their debates at some time during the year. The average number of times a year that audience debates are conducted is 4.952. The range is from zero to 60 times a year. Of the eighty schools reporting, only fourteen have had some of their alternative debate activities for longer than ten years or prior to the recommendations from the National Developmental Conference. However, it is interesting to note a few notable alternatives. For example, both Wabash College in Indiana and East Senior High School in Salt Lake City, Utah have sponsored Pro-Con Forums and Moot Courts for over ten years. The University of Oregon has held its Forensic Festival and Current Issues program for over a decade. Several schools, namely Towson and the University of Utah, have continued to sponsor the Cambridge/Oxford debaters. Pacific Lutheran University has a long tradition of sponsoring Student Congress and Service Club debates.

However, for the majority of schools, the alternatives appear to be relatively new activities. A list of the alternatives delineated from the survey is found in Table One.

In sum, there were fifteen different alternatives listed with Pro-Con Forum as the activity listed most often. Of the eighty schools reporting, only eight or ten percent report that they have a debate team, but do not debate in front of audiences or participate in or sponsor any alternatives. It is interesting to note that only ten percent of the AFA member schools responding are totally tournament centered.

If the audience centered debates are a part of the total forensics program of the majority of schools responding, an analysis of the perceived benefits merits examination. An open-ended question provided a

TABLE ONE

TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE DEBATE ACTIVITIES

TYPES OF ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS RESPONDING	MEAN OF TIMES HELD PER YEAR
PRO-CON FORUM	27	4.25
OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE DEBATERS	17	1.294
MOOT COURT	16	2.14
SYMPOSIUMS FOR HIGH SCHOOLS	7	2.286
SERVICE CLUB DEBATES	4	4.0
STUDENT CONGRESS	3	1.667
STUDENT ELECTIONS	2	1.0
SEMINARS	2	13
LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE	2	3.0
FORENSIC FESTIVALS	2	1.5
CURRENT ISSUES	2	1.5
DEBATES WITH NEARBY TEAMS	2	1.0
TELEVISION DEBATES	1	4.0
OREGON STYLE DEBATE	1	4.0
IRISH DEBATE	1	1.0
PANELS WITH POLITICIANS	1	4.0

number of responses that could be collapsed into twenty benefits. A list of these benefits and the number of responses each generated can be found in Table Two. Of all of the benefits enumerated, the most common response was that audience debates provide visibility for the forensics program. The second most common value of the audience centered debates was the opportunity for audience analysis. The third benefit advanced was that audience debates provide an educational activity for the students involved. The fourth most common response was that audience debate provides an opportunity for students to polish delivery skills and the fifth ranked response was that audience-centered debate creates a more real world environment for the debaters.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Certainly, research of this nature is just a starting point. A number of suggestions for future research are obvious. First, a follow-up survey which would investigate all of the alternatives provided by this survey might be valuable in a number of ways. Such research could be particularly useful in a pedagogical sense if requests for formats and descriptive guidelines of the different alternatives were solicited. In addition, expanding the mailing lists to organizations other than AFA to groups such as CEDA and NFA might increase the list of alternatives. It would also be interesting to conduct a follow-up survey listing the benefits elicited from this survey to see if the rankings hold up when all the benefits are provided. Comparative analysis of these values from the point of view of the debaters, their coaches and the audience members might yield some intriguing findings.

TABLE TWO

PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF DEBATES INVOLVING AUDIENCES

BENEFIT OR VALUE	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS RESPONDING	RANK
VISIBILITY OF DEBATE PROGRAM	46	1
OPPORTUNITY FOR AUDIENCE ANALYSIS	21	2
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY FOR STUDENTS	20	3
INFORMS AUDIENCE OF ISSUES	11	6
AS A METHOD TO FOSTER FINANCIAL SUPPORT	11	6
POLISHES DELIVERY SKILLS OF STUDENT	16	4
ENTERTAINMENT	2	12
PRACTICAL METHOD TO INVOLVE STUDENTS	3	11
PROMOTES CRITICAL THINKING	6	9
CREATES REAL WORLD ENVIRONMENT	9	7
DEVELOPS ARGUMENTATION SKILLS	4	10
RECRUITMENT OF NEW STUDENTS TO THE DEBATE PROGRAM	12	5
PROVIDES PRACTICE IN COMMUNICATING TO GROUPS	7	8
SERVES AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL	2	12
PROVIDES FEEDBACK FOR DEBATERS	3	11
PROVIDES SERVICE TO COMMUNITY	3	11
PROVIDES PRACTICE IN USE OF EMOTIONAL APPEALS	2	12
INCREASES INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION	1	13
ACCOUNTABILITY	1	13
SERVES AS A CONFIDENCE BUILDER	1	13

In a slightly different focus, it would be interesting to discover how many of the debaters from the tournament team actually participate in the audience debates. Furthermore, an investigation that explored how many of the debate team members were recruited via the audience debate might provide meaningful information on how successful the audience-centered debates are for recruitment purposes.

Another perspective that bears examination is the issue of forensic staffing. In particular, it would be wise to examine the number of coaching staff compared to student participants, the amount of released time for forensic related activities, and other personnel issues. Although this study did not survey forensic staff members in interest of time, it is a pertinent issue to consider. As one respondent put it, "The disadvantages of having audiences attending or participating in on-campus debates is that 1) it takes time away from studies and competitive forensics for students and 2) it takes preparation time for coaches—if the activity is to be promoted well."

Besides research regarding practical matters of implementation and values of the alternative debate activities, one would be remiss if they did not see the potential that these audience-centered paradigms hold for conducting research into the nature of argumentation. For example, the moot court activity that one midwestern university conducts has two verdicts ... one that is rendered by the peer jury and a second that is rendered by the general audience. On each of the decision forms, the juror as well as the member of the general audience is asked to provide reasons for their verdict. Feedback such as this could provide persuasion students with a rich resource for beginning research projects into the nature of argumentation in the judicial setting.

In sum, it seems that the potential for future research seems far greater than the limited data this survey generated. Indeed, this posture is consistent with the National Developmental Conference on Forensics which sought to expand the uses and, therefore, the prospect of forensics.[14]

CONCLUSION

In this fledgling search for an audience-centered debate paradigm, it is optimistic to note that alternative activities seem an integral part of the forensics programs surveyed. Although they are varied and multi-facited, the findings suggest that a number of pragmatic as well as educationally sound benefits have been perceived to exist. Hopefully, those individuals who contributed to the Task Force Assembly that was held from September 1 through September 6, 1974, at the Sedalia Retreat House near Denver, Colorado can take heart that the future they were directing for forensics would make use of their recommendations.[15] Although no claim will be posited that the recommendations of the National Conference are the reasons why audience-centered debate paradigms have taken hold in many existing forensics programs, it is worth briefly reviewing those recommendations and providing specific examples of where they are impacting:

Both recommendations One and Seven called for experiences in forensics be provided for as many people as possible and a variety of forums. Both of these recommendations are addressed by the alternatives advanced in this paper. Recommendation Two that suggested forensics should influence public affairs by dissemination of programs to appropriate officials does occur with some legislative assemblies.[16] Recommendation Three which

calls for development and expansion of forensics with related disciplines is happening with the Pro-Con Forums that are frequently conducted.[17] The audiences that are exposed to international debate teams are fostering and implementing the spirit of Recommendation Five. Recommendation Ten is perhaps met in a number of different ways, but the high school symposiums that a number of programs conduct do help make argumentation curriculum available to a wide audience of students. Recommendation Fifteen that suggests that new programs should be developed that adapt to decision making in other areas, especially the judicial, is showing promise of being met through the advent of the undergraduate moot court activity.[18] Although these recommendations are being met only in a sporadic manner and perhaps not with the frequency that one could hope for, nevertheless, these audience-centered debate activities do exist in conjunction with tournament-centered forensic programs for what ever reason and enhance with some specificity the final sentence from the published report, "Forensics as communication is a concept of forensics appropriate to the needs of contemporary education and society."[19] As members of the forensics community enter the second decade following the National Developmental Conference in Forensics, it will be interesting to monitor our progress to determine if we are fostering a concept of forensics as communication that is not only appropriate to the needs of contemporary education and society, but is serving those needs as well as it might.

END NOTES

[1]McBath, James H., ed. Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective. (Skokie: National Textbook, 1975) p. 164.

[2]McBath, pp. 1-165.

[3]McBath, p. 12.

[4]McBath, p. 13.

[5]McBath, p. 13.

[6]McBath, p. 15.

[7]McBath, p. 15.

[8]McBath, p. 17.

[9]McBath, p. 20.

[10]McBath, p. 29.

[11]McBath, p. 32.

[12]The author wishes to acknowledge with appreciation the support that this project was given by the Department of Communication, Ohio State University.

[13]Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2nd ed. Norman H. Nie, et al. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 185.

[14]McBath, pp. 164-165.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Although not all student congress activities send printed copies of their completed bills to elected officials, the author wishes to note that the annual legislative assembly held at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana does follow this practice. The analysis of this event was found in Robert O. Weiss, "Advocacy in the Political Arena: The Legislative Assembly," paper presented at Central States Speech Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 17, 1982.

[17]Several sources address this activity. In particular the following sources are addressed to the campus forum: Kurt W. Ritter, "Recapturing the Rhetorical Dimension: Debating in Campus Forums," Speaker and Gavel 12 (Fall 1974), pp. 1-3; Kurt W. Ritter, "Debate and a Liberal Arts Education: The Forensics Program at the University of Illinois," Speaker and Gavel 14 (Summer 1977), pp. 72-84; Joseph W. Wenzel, "Campus and

Community Programs in Forensics: Needs and Opportunities," Journal of American Forensic Association 7 (Spring 1971), pp. 253-259; James Worth Pence, Jr., "Chapel Hill's Open Forum," Today's Speech 16 (1968), p. 28. John D. Stegman, "Advocacy in the Public Forum: The Pro/Con Program at Ohio State," a paper presented at Central States Speech Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 17, 1982.

[18]Thorpe, Judith M. and Janice Shaw Crouse, "Advocacy in the Courtroom: Moot Court," a paper presented at Central States Speech Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 17, 1982.

[19]McBath, p. 165.

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